After setbacks, Russia boosts space spending

(Reuters [1]) - The country that oversaw the launch of the world's first artificial satellite hopes to regain some of its former glory with a big boost in space spending announced by Russia [2] on Thursday after a series of failures.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved a plan to spend 2.1 trillion roubles ($68.71 billion) on developing Russia's space industry from 2013 to 2020, state-run RIA news agency reported.

"The programme will enable our country to effectively participate in forward-looking projects, such as the International Space Station (ISS), the study of the Moon, Mars and other celestial bodies in the solar system," Medvedev was quoted as saying.

Despite the launch by the former Soviet Union of Sputnik 1 in 1957, triggering the Cold War space race, Russia's space programme has suffered a series of humiliating setbacks in the past year.

These have mostly involved unmanned missions such as satellite launches, that industry veterans [1] blame on a decade of crimped budgets and a brain drain.

Russia budgeted about 100 billion roubles ($3.3 billion) for space programmes annually in 2010 and 2011, far less than the yearly average of the amount Medvedev announced, but he said some of the money [3] would come from outside the state budget.

The failure of a workhorse Proton rocket after launch in August caused the multimillion-dollar loss of an Indonesian and a Russian satellite. A similar problem caused the loss of a $265 million communications satellite last year.

Medvedev criticized the state of the industry in August, saying problems were costing Russia prestige and money [3].

Since the retirement of its space shuttle fleet last year, U.S. space agency NASA has been relying on Russia to take astronauts to the ISS at a cost of $60 million each, and plans to continue until its own new craft is developed in 2017.

($1 = 30.5645 Russian roubles)

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